



Shoot-out ends Salt's Vase season

24 September 2023



Bearsted 1-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Bearsted won 4-1 on penalties. Isuzu F.A. Vase - Second Qualifying Round Saturday 23rd September 2023.

A rather disappointing penalty shoot out, the twelfth in our history, ultimately sealed our exit from the F.A. Vase this season. However, much like the F.A. Cup defeat at Eastbourne, we had looked like going out with a whimper until Captain Callum Wilson pulled us level again as the match finished 1-1 after the ninety minutes was complete.

On the face of it, a draw against a team that are well placed in the Southern Counties East is not a bad result and had this been a League match, we'd probably have been more than happy with a point, but we were unable to take advantage of the Wilson equaliser and what was actually our second worst statistically of the seven shoot outs we have lost, ensured that the correct team went through to the next round.

We made three changes to the line up following the defeat at home to Sheerwater. Up front we had Marlon Pinder who returned to the club in midweek and he came in for Tino Carpene, while Wilson returned at the back in place of Nick Inwugwu and Rory Edwards also came into the starting eleven in place of Chester Clothier.

On a perfect playing surface the opening exchanges were mostly in favour of the home side. Harvey Keogh was in action early to keep out a shot from an angle with his legs before Reece Tierney picked up an early and somewhat harsh yellow card, which was probably given because of the theatrical tumble as it was only fractionally late. On the quarter hour the Bears had a good opportunity but Joel Wakefield sent his strike over the bar from just inside the penalty area.

The home side continued to press and a decent attempt from Jordan Tingley went over Keogh's head, but was wide of the goal and the danger was cleared. Then Wilson made a good block for a corner and from this, there was a concerted appeal for a handball, which certainly had me worried, but the referee wasn't interested and as we broke, Jaan Stanley was brought down, earning Alfie Sanders a yellow card for the home team. Wilson was in action again soon after as he made a fine block from Tingley and as we approached the half another Bearsted corner was headed over by the unmarked Ryan Blake.

The final action of the half was a rare Epsom attack as Tommy Williams found Ade Batula on the left, but his ball across goal was cut out by Frankie Leonard in the Bears goal. In fact we had the first chance of the second half too as a Williams corner was headed clear under pressure from Tierney at the far post, but in the 55th minute we went behind as a good pass in from the left to Ollie Freeman enabled him to square the ball for Tingley to finish from close range.

This had been coming and as with other recent matches it was looking as though we had a mountain to climb. Pinder had a good opportunity from an Ethan Nelson-Roberts left wing cross but his headed contact was minimal and the ball went across goal instead of at it. Our "new" man put in a decent shift and will get better as he regains fitness, but his service was sadly lacking in this match. Even our wing backs, who had provided the best opportunities in recent weeks were not getting forwards as often as they used to; something I feel we need to address if we are to provide more of an attacking threat.

Carpene came on after 66 minutes and looked lively. He was involved in our equaliser five minutes later as Batula did well on the right wing before laying the ball back for Stanley to deliver into Carpene who then knocked the ball on for Wilson, standing around the edge of the penalty area to drive low and hard past Leonard, who got a glove to it, but was never going to keep it out. Without a doubt this was against the run of play and would prove to be our only shot on target, but we'll take anything we can get right now! With our heads up we started to ask more questions and Batula tried his luck from 25 yards, only to see his shot blocked by a defender. Then in the 87th minute Carpene slipped his man and got through, running in on goal from about 40 yards out, but Blake was there to make a crucial tackle just outside the area and our chance was gone. Nelson-Roberts then found Kiyo Brown in the final moments but his shot was also blocked for a corner by a defender.

The home side struck a free kick over the bar during the five minutes of injury time, but the final whistle ensured we would go to penalties. Regrettably we had just taken off our regular penalty taker in Stanley and didn't really turn up for the spot kicks. With Bearsted electing to go first, Phil Headley, Ollie Freeman, Will Johnson-Cole and Blake all scored, rendering their fifth penalty unnecessary as Carpene and Williams both saw their weak kicks saved by Leonard. Wilson netted his penalty in between the two saves, but when Blake's fourth penalty went straight through Keogh it was all over for another year.

There were some positives. Despite missing Ash Snadden and Zach Powell at the back we looked a lot more solid than we had against Sheerwater, but the real concern here is that we are having to do too much defending right now and need to find a way to take the pressure off of our back line for greater periods. Pinder will improve options up front if we can get better service to him, but we now face matches against AFC Croydon Athletic (League Cup) who scored six this day before we travel to Tadley Calleva who hit seven. Neither will be lacking in form or confidence when they face us.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Callum Wilson (c), Ollie Thompson, Reece Tierney, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Thompson (62), Tino Carpene for Pinder (66), Kiyo Brown for Stanley (84)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Epsom's football team concede 4 goals

24 September 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC 2 - 4 Sheerwater. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 16th September 2023.

Last week I wrote that our match against Sheerwater was likely to be a more telling indicator of where we are this season and whilst the football club may sugar coat things, I will be honest here as I always am and state what everyone else at the match was thinking, which is that we are now clearly in a relegation battle before the end of September as we shipped four goals to a team that hadn't scored one in the League for 341 minutes before this match in a truly disheartening 4-2 defeat.

Some people might say that the cup matches are important and we have done well in them this season so far, but our bread and butter is the League and four losses to start the season was not even close to the start we would have wanted. However, it could have been argued in our defence that we had played some good teams this season so far. Regrettably, all of those arguments went up in smoke as we faced a team as low on confidence as we were and still lost in this pivotal match.

There may have been mitigating circumstances. Our first choice back three that played only two weeks ago at Eastbourne United were all out of the starting line up as Callum Wilson and Zach Powell were not available, while Ash Snadden was sitting on the bench. In their places came Ollie Thompson, Nick Inwugwu and Reece Tierney and whilst all have been decent this season, this lack of consistency must have had a bearing on why we conceded four goals for the first time this season. Throw in a jittery performance from our keeper Harvey Keogh behind them and some indiscipline from Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Ade Batula who both found themselves in the sin-bin for unnecessary comments and this all contributed to a home defeat that leaves us in serious trouble at the foot of the table and in danger of being cut adrift.



With Captain and Vice-Captain absent, Chester Clothier took on the armband and in front of a disappointing attendance of 70, despite a perfect day for football we started fairly well. Batula was probably our best player and he made a good run on the ten minute mark which ended with a good pass over to Nelson-Roberts who chose to shoot high from an angle and sent the ball over Billy Wilson's crossbar.

A few minutes later Tommy Whitby sent a free kick over our bar, but Keogh then took his goal kick and passed it straight to an opposition striker just eighteen yards out! As he then ran in clear on goal, Keogh redeemed himself with a good save for a corner that fortunately came to nothing.

We recovered from this near fatal setback and started to create more with Batula prominent, playing more down the right than in his usual central role, but our momentum was checked when we lost Nelson-Roberts to the sin bin for comments he made. Clothier was protesting his teammate's innocence but the referee wasn't interested and off he went for a ten minute break.

Once we were back up to full strength though we had our best period of the game and Batula forced Wilson to tip over his strike from 20 yards. Although the subsequent corner was half cleared, the ball fell to Tommy Williams out on our left hand side who curled an unstoppable strike beyond Wilson and into the top corner via the far post to register an early candidate for goal of the season in the 36th minute.

We looked strong at this point which made the equaliser just seven minutes later a complete surprise to me. The most disappointing aspect was how easily the goal came about, as we appeared to think that a foul on Williams would be given, but the game was not stopped and a ball played out to the right found a player in space and his low ball in was swept past Keogh from just inside the penalty area into the far corner by Theo White. This was the visitors first goal for 384 minutes in League action and it had been so simple. There was no further action of note and the teams went off at the break with a goal each, but a feeling that we had missed our chance.

The second half started with some good interplay between Williams and Batula but the cross into the danger area was headed out. A minute later Batula fed the advancing Inwugwu just eight yards out but his touch let him down badly and the ball was cleared when we really should have had at least a shot on target. Regrettably Batula blotted his copybook when he made a sarcastic remark to the Assistant after being denied a throw in and found himself sitting down for ten minutes. Although Tino Carpene had a great chance in the 56th minute well blocked by Wilson while we were a man short, our opponents took the lead just sixty seconds later when Elliott York was put through on the left and he lifted the ball over Keogh to go 2-1 up.

The game drifted for a while, but with eleven men back on the field we secured the equaliser in the 73rd minute after Carpene won the ball just outside the area and he fed Jaan Stanley on the left whose delivery was side footed into the roof of the net from six yards by the unmarked Batula.

Just as it felt like we had got back into the match and were about to kick on for a winning goal, we were behind once again as a 75th minute free kick from White was met at the far post by the unmarked Rhys Paul who gave Keogh no chance from fairly close range and a minute later White tried his luck from 20 yards and the ball sailed into the roof of the net to make the score 4-2.

We had a couple of half chances as we tried to fight back with substitute Ben Amissah unlucky to see his near post header flick off a defender and drop just wide from a Kiyo Brown left wing cross and Wilson was down well to keep out a Brown drive, but the visitors had their moments too with Keogh doing well to keep out a close range effort at the near post.

We then had the very rare sight of a board advertising that six minutes of extra time would be played and in that period Batula struck wide from a good position before Amissah headed a left wing cross just over the bar. The chances were gone and the final whistle confirmed a depressing score line.

Overall, and in terms of possession and chances you could argue that we were no worse than Sheerwater, who themselves were not that impressive, but we made enough errors, both mental and physical over the ninety minutes to say that we probably deserved what we got. It was interesting at full time to see the players holding an inquest on the field with all the Coaches and Management having walked away by that point. I'll be honest though, I don't think our squad is strong enough right now and it will be key to see whether we will have any new faces in the next week or two, because without any we are going to be in a big struggle for the rest of the season.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Ollie Thompson, Reece Tierney, Ade Batula, Chester Clothier, Tino Carpene, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Rory Edwards for Adeyemi (63), Ben Amissah for Carpene (77), Kiyo Brown for Stanley (77), Ash Snadden for Tierney (83), Ayran Kugathas for Williams (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Bullish performance beats the Salts

24 September 2023



Jersey Bulls 2-0 Epsom & Ewell - Combined Counties League - Premier Division South - Saturday 9th September 2023.

Our fourth defeat from four League matches was maybe no real surprise for most Epsom supporters as Jersey Bulls defeated us by two goals to nil, even though our failure to register a shot of any concern to the home keeper was a little concerning. On a blisteringly hot day, the home side gradually wore us down and by the end we were a well beaten side, even though I thought we did a good job defensively for much of the match.

In front of an attendance advised as 533; low for Jersey, but in my opinion around a hundred above the actual number who were present, based on a less than half full stand that holds nearly a thousand, we took the field with a few changes from our loss at Eastbourne United. Ayran Kugathas came in for the suspended Tommy Williams, while Ollie Thompson started at the back ahead of Ash Snadden. Further forward Jaan Stanley returned to the starting eleven with Tino Carpene dropping to the bench.

It was Hawaiian day at Jersey and many of the supporters were wearing garlands presented in the Jersey fan zone that opened up before the match. However, there was little for our boys to celebrate and as the players "warmed up" (as if they needed to get warmer!) you could tell that this was going to be a difficult day against a team that passed the ball around for fun.

The first real action occurred in the seventh minute when Harvey Keogh was out quickly to block as a striker broke through. We won a corner at the other end but there was no one there to finish the delivery on after it was flicked on by a defender. Both sides had another opportunity inside the first twenty minutes as a good run by the Jersey number 11 finished with a shot dragged across goal, before a Rory Edwards corner was cleared at the near post, but only as far as Ethan Nelson-Roberts who struck the ball well enough, but it just cleared the Jersey bar. What we didn't realise at the time was that this would be our best chance of the match.

We had a scare in the 27th minute when a mis-hit shot spun up in the air, and Keogh then dropped it and we had a moment of panic in the six yard area before the danger was cleared. However, we were back on the attack soon after as Zach Powell sent a lovely pass through to Ade Batula on the right, who cut in only to see his shot blocked by a defender.

We had an unusual incident in the 33rd minute. Shortly after completing a five minute water break, the referee called a halt to proceedings once again and it transpired that he was struggling with his vision (insert joke here!), but fortunately a Jersey official was able to fill the breach on the line after one of the Assistants stepped up to take the whistle.

The game continued in a similar pattern with Jersey controlling much of the ball, and their number 10 struck at goal but it went high and in the direction of St Helier High Street with the only danger being to passers by outside the ground. On a more serious note we were beginning to concede some free kicks on the edge of the area and from one of these, the ball clipped the wall and forced Keogh into a fine save, tipping the ball over for a corner. For sure the danger signs were there at the half, but we managed to get in to the shade of the dressing room goalless.

Unfortunately, and much like the previous FA Cup match, we conceded early in the second half after another clumsy foul had conceded a free kick out on the Jersey left. The delivery was met with an unmarked header which Keogh kept out, but the ball fell to Adam Trotter around fifteen yards out and his shot went through a crowd of people into the net with Keogh either unsighted or beaten by a deflection.

This was the signal for the drums and bells to start playing for a while as the previously quiet home support suddenly found their voice. In the carnival atmosphere



Keogh kept out another low drive that was just creeping inside the post with his left leg and although we attacked with a good run from Kiyo Brown, his powerful looking shot had all the pace taken off it by a defender and it dribbled through apologetically to the keeper.

The hosts sent another header straight at Keogh midway through the second half as we began to get pushed back further and Powell picked up a yellow card to go with the one Batula had picked up at the start of the half. Fresh legs came on with Carpene, Sirak Negassi, Nick Inwugwu and then Snadden all joined the action, but we were struggling to get out of our half as the Bulls seemed to be toying with us at times. Keogh made another flying full stretch save but in the 84th minute Edwards appeared to be clattered in the middle of the park and we all stopped, expecting the free kick that never came and they nipped through to score their second goal through Le Quesne. It was the least they deserved, even if we shouldn't have switched off, but fortunately a few minutes later the torture was over. In fact this match was very similar in nature to the identical defeat we suffered on our previous visit in 2019.

Some of our Committee appeared rather over-disappointed by the result after the match, and some even expressed the view that the home side weren't that great, but they did more than enough to secure the win against us and you had the feeling that they had another gear or two if required. We have to be realistic about our ambitions this season and accept that sometimes the opposition are on a different level to us right now. That was definitely the case in this encounter and the only things we took home from Jersey were some garlands and a sun tan!

It could be said that four straight defeats to open the season is a poor start, but in our defence, we have played arguably two of the better sides in the division in Jersey and Redhill and were extremely unlucky to lose in the closing seconds at Fleet Town on the opening day, as a point gained there would have kept us off the foot of the table position we currently occupy. However, we do need to start picking up points soon and whilst I'm not that downhearted about our defeat on the Island, our next match at home to Sheerwater on Saturday is likely to be a much more telling indication of where we actually stand this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Callum Wilson (c), Ollie Thompson, Zach Powell, Ade Batula, Chester Clothier, Jaan Stanley, Rory Edwards, Kiyo Brown

Subs: Tino Carpene for Batula (57), Sirak Negassi for Kugathas (73), Nick Inwugwu for Powell (73), Ash Snadden for Clothier (78)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Unarresting match with the police

24 September 2023



Epsom & Ewell 0-0 Met Police. Emirates F.A. Cup - Preliminary Round. Friday 18th August 2023.

We had our first taste of Friday night football at the Madgwick this season as Isthmian League Met Police visited for this Emirates FA Cup tie and despite having the lion's share of the possession, rarely threatened in this goalless draw. This was the ninth time the clubs had met in this competition and we have only won two of the matches, with three draws now.

For our part, we were missing three players who were injured in Tuesday's League match and at times almost seemed content to cancel the opposition out and aim for a replay, where hopefully some of the walking wounded will be able to return.

The first bit of good news was that first choice keeper Harvey Keogh was back between the posts after dislocating his little finger in the Redhill warm up, but unfortunately Jaan Stanley, Callum Wilson and Tommy Williams were all unable to go, so Zach Powell took the armband on with Ayran Kugathas and Chester Clothier in place of the others. Additionally Ollie Thompson and Sirak Negassi moved onto the bench and Tino Carpene and Nick Inwugwu took their places.

Before the match commenced a minute's applause was held in recognition of regular supporter Mark Durbridge who passed away on Friday 11th August. A few former players and his family were present and all stood around the centre circle with the teams and officials for the duration of the applause.

We have had some slow starts this season and we got off to a nervy opening in this match too. Kugathas sent his header beyond Keogh and out for an unnecessary corner which was half cleared to the edge of the box where we then conceded a free kick. Fortunately, the strike on goal was dealt with easily enough by our keeper. However, in the seventh minute Bayley Mummery struck a shot against our far post and although the ball rebounded back into play, it appeared from where I was as though another player then struck our other post, but by this time the flag was raised for offside and the danger was over.

We had our first opportunity in the tenth minute when the ball was fed through to Kiyo Brown and he ran at goal, although his shot was too close to the experienced Liam Beach and he tipped the ball over for a corner which we were unable to take advantage of. Brown then had another run, but what looked like being a threatening ball in was blocked at the last second by a defender.

However, for the majority of the half we were on the defensive, happy to counter attack when the chance arose and looking quite difficult to break down. We also had a couple of yellow cards in the middle of the park with Rory Edwards getting one and then Alfie Walters for a cynical trip on Carpene who had threatened to get away on the left wing. This would have consequences for their defender later. There was nearly a third yellow card after Carpene was brought down by Laurence Ernest and the referee was there quickly to wave the card before being made aware that his Assistant had flagged belatedly for the ball going out of play.

Kugathas was next to pick up a yellow for pulling back his man as this stop-start game was never really allowed to get going. Regular visits from our physio ensured that an extra six minutes were played, but there was nothing of note within it and the teams trooped off at the break with honours even.

The second half started in a similar fashion and we weren't asking many questions of our visitors, although Brown got to the touchline once, but his low ball in was cut out by Beach. Next to try was Ade Batula, but his shot from a narrow angle was never going to beat the well-positioned keeper who blocked the ball out for a corner.

Brown picked up a yellow card for a clumsy tackle before Dan Stewart also found his way into the rapidly filling book, even though this was not a dirty game in any way. Unfortunately with fifteen minutes of normal time remaining Powell limped off and Ollie Thompson came on at the back, moving Inwugwu to a centre position within the back three and Clothier inherited the arm band. A sixth card followed for another visiting player for a foul on Ethan Nelson-Roberts and two further substitutions occurred for us with Ben Amissah coming on for Carpene and Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez made his debut in relief of Nelson-Roberts.

We still appeared to be quite happy not to rush things and to settle for a replay, but nearly won the tie in the 92nd minute after Amissah was put through on goal. Regrettably, he stumbled and this enabled Beach to get a hand to the ball before our man could fully recover. However, the loose ball fell kindly for Batula who just needed to clip the ball over the retreating defenders from twenty-five yards, which he did, but it didn't come down in time and thumped the Met crossbar before going over for a goal kick.

There was time for an unusual incident in the 93rd minute as Walters had been injured and Beach told him to leave the pitch so as not to play any of our players onside. However, he then came back on after the attack had been cleared and picked up a second yellow card for re-entering the field of play without permission. Harsh!

Ultimately, the fact that I am referring to all the yellow cards and substitutions tells you that there wasn't really much to report in terms of real opportunities in this match. It was constantly interrupted by injury and the somewhat fussy referee and the crowd of around 165 or so probably wondered whether they should have bothered to come out at all as the rain then gave them a thorough soaking as they walked 300 yards to reach their cars!

Most importantly though, the two teams remain in the hat for Monday's draw and will now meet again on Tuesday for the replay, which will have to be settled on the night, even if it takes extra time and penalties. There is one good omen here as the last time we met in the FA Cup back in 1989 we drew 0-0 at home before winning the replay 2-0 at Imber Court. Déjà vu anyone?

[For the replay report visit: www.eefconline.co.uk as Epsom and Ewell Times will be on a short production break.]

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell (c), Nick Inwugwu, Ash Snadden, Kiyo Brown, Chester Clothier, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpene

Subs: Ollie Thompson for Powell (75), Ben Amissah for Carpene (83), Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez for Nelson-Roberts (87)



Redhill cruise to victory on Epsom waters

24 September 2023



Epsom & Ewell 1-3 Redhill. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Tuesday 15th August 2023.

We opened up our home League campaign on Tuesday evening against Redhill and found out fairly quickly why they will be involved at the business end of the table come season's end as they cruised to a 3-1 victory.

It has to be said that we didn't have a lot of fortune over the course of the evening either. Before the match Harvey Keogh jammed his finger into the turf making a save in the warm up and with it either dislocated or broken, Toby Colwell came in for his debut at rather short notice. Also making his debut was Kiyo Brown and he showed up well in the first half before being replaced in the second.

This was one of those matches that you watched from a distance. As most people know, I stand behind the goal we attack and if I'm honest, there wasn't an awful lot of that going on in this match!

Redhill had cheekily created a match poster including four former Salts, Adam Grant, Gavin Quintyne, Athan Smith-Joseph and Coach Matt Chapman, but they could have also included Manager Jordan Clark and Tom Harland-Goddard too. As it turned out, only the ageless Quintyne and Smith-Joseph were in the starting eleven and they nearly took an early lead when Colwell stood up well to make a fine save from a Smith-Joseph shot in the fourth minute which was then cleared.

A couple of dangerous crosses went through our six yard box and out as Redhill controlled much of the first half. We had occasional half chances and Ethan Nelson-Roberts was set up for a strike by Sirak Negassi, but his shot was easily dealt with by Luke Roberts in the Redhill goal.

We then saw our Captain Callum Wilson injure his ankle in a collision with a Redhill player and although he had treatment, he was clearly not able to continue much longer and he limped off around ten minutes later. Negassi got past Quintyne who brought him down cynically, although no card was issued when it probably should have been, and Rory Edwards sent the free kick from an angle goalwards, but without enough power to trouble Roberts.

The visitors continued to threaten and Jack Saunders struck the bar from the edge of the penalty area, having just shot over the bar moments previously. Then Reuben Duncan sent his low shot just beyond our far post. They were getting closer and it was no surprise when they went ahead in the 39th minute with a move down the left that was finished off by a shot from around 15 yards across Colwell into the far corner by Tyrese Sutherland.

At this point Wilson was replaced and a couple of minutes later Tommy Williams also needed to go off. In fact every few minutes it seemed like we had another player on the deck. Nick Inwugwu and Ayran Kugathas came on in their places, but Duncan broke through in the 48th minute after we had failed to clear the danger and smashed the ball back past Colwell from just inside the area, giving him no chance as Redhill registered their second goal. It nearly got worse as Inwugwu had to be alert to clear the ball off the line and although Ade Batula struck just over in the eighth minute of injury time, it was a very despondent looking Salts eleven that trooped off at the break.

The visitors continued to press in the second half and shots came in, but we weathered the storm and on the hour we started to become a lot more competitive ourselves, and the final half hour was much more even as a contest. We put together a good move, only for the final pass to Batula to be accompanied by the raising of the Assistant's flag for offside. We then held the ball for a bit of time, although the Redhill defence looked fairly solid and despite having our best ten minutes of the match we then conceded a third goal when Grant broke through our defence and finished easily past Colwell in the 70th minute.

We made a couple of substitutions with Ben Amissah and Jaan Stanley joining the fray and Batula saw his shot deflected for a corner. The 79th minute set piece looked like being an easy catch for Roberts, but he dropped it and Inwugwu was there to force the loose ball over the line at the second attempt to register his first goal for the club with the Redhill defenders hoping for a flag or whistle that might save them, but it didn't come, and rightly so.

Despite pulling a goal back, we rarely looked like adding to it and Redhill almost scored a fourth with a great crossfield pass to the right wing where a low shot from an angle was parried to safety by Colwell. In the final minute of normal time we had our final opportunity when a long ball found the advancing Zach Powell who set up substitute Jaan Stanley who found Batula but the shot was dragged across goal with his weaker foot.

To be fair though, a second goal on the night would have seriously flattered us and we could have no complaints with the final score. More concerningly, with Friday's F.A. Cup match coming up against Met Police there must surely be some question marks over the availability of some of our players following the injuries and with other players Chester Clothier and Ben Bauchop at the match but also unable to play, we appear to have a rather early injury crisis.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell, Ollie Thompson, Callum Wilson ©, Kiyo Brown, Ash Snadden, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Wilson (41), Ayran Kugathas for Williams (44), Jaan Stanley for Brown (74), Ben Amissah for Negassi (74)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Cruel ending at Calthorpe Park for Epsom and Ewell FC

24 September 2023



Fleet Town 2-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 12th August 2023.

Despite a slow start to our opening League fixture of the season, we fought back to equalise and deserve a draw, only to then lose the match to a long range deflected strike in the fourth minute of injury time as Fleet Town edged through by the narrowest of 2-1 score lines.

We made four changes from our win over Horsham YMCA. Our Assistant Manager Ash Snadden was getting married, while Ade Batula and Chester Clothier were unavailable and Nick Inwugwu started on the bench. In their places came Rory Edwards, Ollie Thompson and Sirak Negassi who had all come off the bench the previous Saturday, while Ben Bauchop made his first appearance of the season. Snadden's absence, together with both of our coaches Steve Springett and Kevin Espinosa being away, resulted in an emergency call for another of our previous keepers Dave Tidy to step into the role and help James Scott out on the sidelines. Tidy actually had a foot in both camps for this match as had also coached the opposition keeper Roan Strong!

As with recent previous matches we made a slow start and in front of a loud crowd that gave the impression of being more than the official attendance of 109 we went behind in the sixth minute after Bauchop was caught in possession and on a lightning counter attack the ball was fed through to Connor Young who slotted the ball past Harvey Keogh from around twelve yards.

It nearly got worse as our Captain Callum Wilson then also found himself robbed on the edge of the area, although on this occasion the shot was an easy one for Keogh to deal with. The home side were pressing us at every opportunity and it took us a while to come to terms with this.

However, as the half progressed we began to improve and Sirak Negassi got a decent shot away that Strong was able to beat away. Strong played in our colours back in a January friendly before spending the season at South Park and appeared very solid here. He was then alert to make a good save from Negassi a few



minutes later after our man had won the ball after a Farnham defender had been caught in possession.

It was at times a very rapid contest with both teams really pushing the other and this energy was shown best by our left wing back Ethan Nelson-Roberts. He had been competing well against the dangerous Fleet winger Naz Miah and in the 39th minute he got forward and won a free kick out wide after the referee had decided we had no advantage. This was a crucial decision as Edwards then whipped in a free kick and Thompson met it about three yards beyond the far post with a solid header back into the net for our equaliser.

The second half started with a scare as Miah went down in the penalty area under a challenge, after making a good run, but it wasn't convincing enough and we escaped. We then had a great opportunity when Bauchop took the ball off a defender and we were suddenly three on two on the edge of the Fleet area, but he couldn't pick a pass to a waiting teammate and we were unable to take advantage.

The game was switching from end to end and if anything it was probably a little too open for both Managers' liking. It also became a bit scrappy in patches as both teams fought for every inch out there. On the hour, former Salt Sam Marks put a decent ball in from the right, although Wilson did well to clear the danger at the last minute with a stretching volley. Miah was then clattered by Thompson who picked up our second yellow card after Wilson in the first half and we made a couple of substitutions with Nick Inwugwu coming on for Thompson and Ben Amissah making his debut in relief of Jaan Stanley who had a quiet day by his standards.

Then things got a little nervy in our area and a close range header was well saved by Keogh. In response Amissah made a good run and found Negassi, although his shot didn't trouble Strong. We saw another debutant enter the fray as Ayran Kugathas came on for Tommy Williams on the right before it was our turn to press for a while. Nelson-Roberts put in a great burst on the left and his low ball in was turned away by a defender, even though a goal kick was awarded. Then Amissah got through on the left too and drew the keeper out, but his pull back was cleared for another corner. Tino Carpene was next to strike at goal from twelve yards but Strong made a good save.

It looked as though it was a matter of time before we would pinch the win, and the Fleet Manager was having kittens on the touchline, but a cruel twist of fate was waiting for us in the 94th minute when Mohamed Konte struck speculatively at goal from around twenty-five yards. I've been advised by people from a different angle to me, who thought the shot was going wide, but the ball struck Inwugwu and flew into the opposite corner with Keogh helpless to do anything about it.

There was still time for us to have a couple of chances as the final seconds expired and Negassi saw his angled shot kept out by Strong. Then from the corner it was all hands to the pump as we rained in three shots on goal in about ten seconds; the second of which from Inwugwu hit a defender fully on the chest while he was standing on the line. A yard either side and we'd have been level, but there were no infringements by the home side and shortly after this the final whistle blew.

Did we deserve to lose this match? Absolutely not! However, for what it's worth and regardless of the entertaining contest, I felt that neither team had done quite enough to say they deserved the win and a 1-1 draw would have been a fair result from this most even of contests. Alas, it was not to be and we now face high-flying Redhill in our opening home League match in three days time.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell, Ollie Thompson, Callum Wilson ©, Sirak Negassi, Ben Bauchop, Jaan Stanley, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpene

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Thompson (70), Ben Amissah for Stanley (70), Ayran Kugathas for Williams (77)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Salts open season with FA Cup win

24 September 2023



Epsom & Ewell 2-1 Horsham YMCA. Emirates F.A. Cup - Extra-Preliminary Round. Saturday 5th August 2023.

The James Scott era kicked off on Saturday as we opened up our fifth different ground share at Cobham's Reg Madgwick Stadium with a narrow 2-1 win over Horsham YMCA in what was just the second ever competitive meeting between the clubs.

As is almost always the case with a new Manager, you see some new players on the field. However, today's match also set a club record here as ten players made their debuts. We had nine new faces at the start of the match, equaling the record set in both 1945 and 1982 (if you exclude our first ever match of course!) and a tenth debutant, Sirak Negathas, would join the fray from the bench in the second half to set a new mark.

We have of course spent some time at Step Six in recent years, and as a result this was our first F.A. Cup fixture since losing 3-0 after extra time to Beckenham Town way back in the August of 2018, so it's been a while, but we were fortunate that the game took place at all as a torrential downpour made the new artificial surface waterlogged as the players tried to warm up. It looked like the game would be called off, but the referee chose to wait for a while to see whether conditions would improve and at just around 3.00pm the rain relented. By 3.15 it was clear that the surface was going to be playable shortly and we kicked off at 3.30 on the dot! How nice to see a match official apply a bit of common sense, instead of going by the book, which would have forced us all to congregate there again on the Wednesday!

We finally got going under cloudy and leaden skies, but just like our final friendly on Tuesday against Corinthian Casuals we were a bit slow out of the blocks against a team that had already played two Southern Combination League matches and almost went behind in the third minute after a miscommunication between Zach Powell and our new keeper Harvey Keogh resulting in a back pass that was just creeping inside the post before Keogh recovered to claw the ball away.

Keogh looked like he was going to have a busy day as the visitors threatened again seconds later and he had to make a superb double save; first from a long range strike and then from the follow up from a narrow angle. We hadn't really started and he then had to make a third save to tip a header wide from a Horsham YMCA free kick, all inside the opening ten minutes!

The match was taking place almost exclusively in our half and Keogh had to palm away another shot after one of our defenders Nick Inwugwu had been dispossessed, before the visitors finally took the lead in the 21st minute. A corner wasn't fully cleared by our boys and Sekou Toure swivelled well and struck the ball back across everyone into the far corner from around 18 yards.

It was the least they deserved to this point, but we made some changes to our shape and started to look a little more competitive. Tommy Williams made some progress down the right and set up Jaan Stanley, who laid the ball into the path of Ade Batula, but the side footed strike was a weak one and was straight at Harrison Mott in the YMCA goal. Batula then had another chance from an angle which forced Mott into a more challenging save and from the loose ball Williams sent a deep ball in that was headed away from Ethan Nelson-Roberts at the last second.

Nelson-Roberts then picked up a booking for a reason completely unknown to me and new Club Captain Callum Wilson tried his luck from fully forty yards but the shot dribbled wide of the goal. Just as I was about to send out a half time tweet advising the deficit, we pulled out an equaliser somewhat against the run of play as Batula got away down the left flank, cut in and slotted the ball past Mott from about eight yards in the second minute of injury time with the visiting defence nowhere. This was even more impressive seeing as Batula had just received treatment after being on the wrong end of a solid, crunching but fair challenge from Danny White, following a bit of a hospital pass from Ash Snaddon our Assistant Manager!

In the end we played around five minutes of added time, for this and two other delays caused by injury to visiting players who had to be substituted off and a third YMCA substitution would be required just nine minutes into the second half, leaving them with none left, due to the limit of three in FA Cup ties.

As the second half progressed we found ourselves a little on the defensive and a sliced clearance from Keogh gave the opposition a good chance, but the attack was blocked out excellently by Inwugwu for a corner, although as a result of the challenge he was replaced a couple of minutes later by Ollie Thompson. However, in the 63rd minute we took the lead. Williams made good ground on the right wing and his low ball in was just reached by Tino Carpene who got his toe to the ball ahead of a defensive challenge just inside the box and won the penalty. It can't have looked too clear for others as a couple of people asked for my view on it during and after the match, but I was certain and more importantly, so was the referee!

Stanley stepped up and scored his third penalty in three weeks, but his first official one for the club in the 64th minute to give us a 2-1 advantage that we would



not let slip. The visitors pushed for an equaliser but they seemed to have run out of ideas and were restricted to a couple of long range efforts and a shot dragged across goal from twelve yards which really should have hit the target. We rarely looked in danger and might even have made it 3-1 after a great run down the right from substitute Negathas which ended with a pull back for Stanley, but he sent the chance just over the bar from ten yards out.

Fortunately the miss didn't cost us and after nearly nine minutes of injury time the final whistle confirmed the victory which now gives us a home tie against Step Four Met Police in the Preliminary Round. It wasn't the greatest of starts, but we grew into what became quite an enjoyable match and I'm just grateful that the game was played, even if it was the final tie to complete on this FA Cup Saturday!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell, Nick Inwugwu, Callum Wilson ©, Ade Batula, Ash Snaddon, Jaan Stanley, Chester Clothier, Tino Carpene

Subs: Ollie Thompson for Inwugwu (61), Rory Edwards for Snaddon (78), Sirak Negathas for Carpene (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"Long-live" the Salts. Crowned with promotion.

24 September 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC 2-1 Wick FC. Southern Combination League - Division One Playoff Final. Saturday 6th May 2023.

Thirty years to the day after our final first team match at West Street, we made our final bow at Fetcham Grove but in much happier circumstances, as our 2-1 win over Wick ensured us of promotion back to Step Five for the first time since the dark days of our Centenary relegation season of 2017/18.

The pressure was on. Our second place finish and subsequent home advantage for the playoffs had made us favourites and we had come through a nervy encounter against Selsey just seven days previously. How would we fare against Wick? Well, it was never going to be a comfortable afternoon for an Epsom supporter (but then, did anyone expect any different!) and the match will only live long in the memory for three things. 1) Two wonderful strikes from Jaevon Dyer. 2) A horrible challenge on Dyer in the closing seconds. 3) The significance of what has been achieved with this result, with a return to the Combined Counties League appearing nailed on and the challenges that will bring, including another trip to face Jersey Bulls.

Of course playoff finals are rarely of high quality; they are all about the occasion and the performance means nothing whatsoever without the result, so our players deserve a lot of credit. After being hauled back to 1-1 and with momentum appearing to be slipping away, they turned the contest around and finished worthy winners in the end.

An attendance of 384; our largest at home since our final League match at West Street in April 1993 when Aldershot Town supplied a large number of the 1,087 present that day, gathered in the pouring rain to see whether we could clinch promotion. The visitors brought a group of people with them who certainly contributed to the atmosphere at the Leisure Centre end of the ground, and how Wick must wish that they followed them on a regular basis!

We took the field with just two changes from our win against Selsey with Kevin Moreno-Gomez coming in for Johnny "Sonic" Akoto and Lewis Pearch starting ahead of Jamie Byatt. The opening exchanges were fairly tame as both clubs settled into the occasion, with the Wick drummer setting a beat for the match which started to take on a carnival atmosphere as the rain began to relent.

The first chance of the match came our way in the 11th minute after a clever pass inside the defender to Pearch who bore down on goal, only to be denied by a fantastic save from Keelan Belcher who just got a leg to the low shot, diverting the ball a couple of feet wide of the goal. Belcher was then required to punch the ball away under pressure from Dylan Merchant seconds later, but the next real action came just after the twenty minute mark with a snap shot from Dave Crouch that Tom Theobald dealt with fairly comfortably.

The game was meandering a little if I'm honest until it all changed in the 31st minute when Athan Smith-Joseph got down the left wing. His cross went beyond everyone but was collected by Dyer, almost out on the touchline and he beat two men, before cutting onto his right foot and drilling the ball, via a faint deflection, low past Belcher at his near post. It was a superb strike and on a wet day, the ball skidded through at quite a pace before nestling in the net and justifying in one instant why I love standing behind the goal we attack, even if it was difficult to hear yourself speak at times, something that doesn't often happen at Epsom games!

Smith-Joseph tried his luck five minutes later with Gideon Acheampong, making his 100th appearance for the Salts, providing a great overlap, but the shot was weak and wide. The game then seemed to take on a strange pattern with our boys unsure of whether to push forward for a second goal, and Wick then began to hold a greater share of the possession for a while, although were rarely threatening with it until the final seconds of the half when Theobald palmed away a stinging drive from distance from Sam Connolly.

The rain started again as the players came out for the second half, but the pattern of passiveness continued. We didn't seem to know whether to stick or twist although Moreno-Gomez was notably getting forward more and his perfect centre was missed completely by the incoming Pearch just six yards out just five minutes into the second period! Theobald was out to clear a long ball shortly afterwards but as the half progressed, we seemed happy enough to allow the visitors to retain the ball more; a tactic that is obviously not without risk. Additionally, Acheampong began to see more and more of the ball on his side, but without any help as two players often appeared on his flank and from one of these attacks, we had a close escape when a deep cross was headed over at the far post.

Our Manager Matt Chapman clearly noticed this development and we made a substitution with the ageless Byatt coming on for Smith-Joseph and Pearch moving out to the right, presumably to help out on that flank where required, but before the new plan had really settled in the visitors were level as a harmless looking ball in from the Wick left wasn't claimed by anyone and Theobald had to come out for the ball and was adjudged to have clipped Aaron Tester in the penalty area. It certainly looked like a penalty to me, but people nearer the incident weren't convinced. Either way though Connolly stepped up and clinically beat Theobald from the spot in the 66th minute. It's hard to pin any blame onto any one individual here, especially from eighty yards away, so it's probably best to describe this one as a defensive miscommunication!

Of course, it is easy to make light of it now, but at the time, this was a concerning development. We had surrendered any momentum we had built up and would effectively have to go out and win the match once again. Dyer was a constant thorn in their sides though and was clumsily brought down on the edge of the area, but out wide, from where Gavin Quintyne's free kick went straight through the wall and struck the inside of Belcher's right hand post, flying across the six yard box and away. Dyer was continuing to receive some rough treatment and found himself on the deck in the area a few minutes later, but fortunately was able to continue after treatment.

Byatt then struck at Belcher from twenty yards as we began our push for the finish line before the key moment of our season occurred in the 82nd minute. For anyone who had missed the first goal, Dyer kindly produced a carbon copy for his second, collecting the ball out on the left wing, beating two men once again and then cutting onto his right foot before drilling the ball in at the near post. Belcher got a glove to the ball, but to be fair the shot was much too powerful and accurate and we were ahead again, this time to stay.

It was all down to game management now and we saw out the final minutes without any defensive worries, although there was still time for controversy as we caught Wick on the break and Dyer nicked the ball past Marshall Ball, only to find himself the victim of an assault on the touchline with a horrible knee high lunge. Fortunately for Dyer he saw it coming and wasn't bearing any weight at the time of the challenge, or it could have been really serious and I am happy to report that he is fine now. The referee had the red card out within seconds as our players then converged on the scene and the obligatory scuffles followed, during which Nick Wilson received a red card. Both will now receive a three game suspension at the start of the next season, but it does seem harsh that Wilson will receive the same punishment as Ball, because it was a horrible foul; a dark red card, if there was such a thing.

Fortunately, the final couple of minutes were played out without further incident and after nearly six minutes of injury time the final whistle confirmed our success. The players gathered together and blue flares were set off by the players on the pitch as the celebrations began. It was quite a sight!

It's been a tumultuous season with numerous changes to the Management and the squad for a number of reasons, some of which were unnecessary. However, the players pulled us through and Dyer in particular will deserve his own chapter in our club's history as we now get a chance to establish ourselves back at Step Five once again, which was extremely pivotal, maybe even to our entire existence as a club. The promotion means that we will now be entered back into the FA Cup and the Senior County Cup and will hopefully herald the start of brighter times. Many issues remain at our club, but these are all for another day.



Maybe the final word should go to our defender Steve Springett, who has suffered a broken ankle, a broken nose, a badly dislocated thumb and various other injury concerns over his two seasons here, and described this season as "unfinished business" after falling in the playoffs last season. Now at least he can say it is mission accomplished! Well done chaps!

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Nick Wilson, Steve Springett, Dylan Merchant, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Lewis Pearch, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Jamie Byatt for Pearch (64), Rory Edwards for Pearch (84), Thompson Adeyemi for Stanley (84)

Article here about the 30 years since Epsom and Ewell played at the West Street ground.

Playoff penalty points presage Premier promotion?

24 September 2023



Epsom and Ewell win 6-5 on penalties. Southern Combination League - Division One Playoff Semi-Final. Saturday 29th April 2023.

Two good saves from Tom Theobald added to some well struck penalties were enough for us to edge past Selsey and into a home playoff final against Wick next Saturday after a goalless ninety minutes at Fetcham Grove was followed by the lottery of a penalty shootout.

On a sunny and thankfully dry day a crowd of just over 200, our largest for many years were present and it was good to see a large contingent of former Epsom players watching the match. Of the ones I saw, from the 80s we had Mark Norman, the 90s Paul Meredith and Jimmy Dack, while from more recent seasons we had Daryl Cooper-Smith and Rob Hendry along with Dale Hanson-Byatt, Louis Chin and Jerry Antwi. In addition both of our former Managers from earlier in the season Anthony Jupp and Liam Giles were also present. We almost had more players on the sideline than we had on the pitch!

It's only fair to say that it was a very nervous and underwhelming contest at times. The match seemed to follow a regular pattern for much of the game with our boys holding most of the possession but failing to really threaten Syd Davies in the visitors goal. Selsey attacked from time to time, but not with the same frequency and the decision to give Johnny "Sonic" Akoto the job of marking their danger man Shane Brazil out of the game was the main reason the visitors carried so little threat, switching over with Gideon Acheampong whenever he switched wings. In fact, he's probably still marking him now!

As with most weeks we rotated the squad once again; at the back Sonic and Dylan Merchant came in for Lewis Pearch and Alex Penfold, both of whom dropped to the bench. Nick Wilson came in for Rory Edwards, while Jaevon Dyer also returned to the starting eleven at the expense of George Owusu and Jaan Stanley also started ahead of Thompson Adeyemi. It was a strong looking line-up, but it was also a strong looking bench too and they would be needed as the match went on.

We started brightly with Stanley putting Athan Smith-Joseph through in the seventh minute, but his attempt to score against the same opponents for the fifth successive game was well blocked for a corner. Next to try was Jamie Byatt whose shot was also deflected wide. We won a lot of corners in this match, but we were lacking a bit of height in the penalty area and we very rarely looked like having success from the set pieces against a well-marshalled Selsey defence. In fact we only really had one opportunity when Stanley met a Steve Springett corner with a downwards header that was cleared by a defender standing on the goal line right by the post.

Both Smith-Joseph and Dyer were asking a lot of questions of the visiting full backs, but there was very little in the way of real service for Byatt to take advantage of. To be fair though, we were looking equally solid ourselves and when Akoto broke down the left wing Brazil brought him down, earning the first yellow card of the match, although we would eventually see two issued to each side.

Just after the half hour a lovely crossfield ball was taken in stride by Smith-Joseph, although his attempt to nick the ball over Davies was blocked out for a corner and the closest we came in the half was when Akoto's deep cross caught everyone out and bounced out for a goal kick off the Selsey crossbar.

The pattern of the first half continued into the second and Dyer sent a header over the bar before Smith-Joseph sent a shot goalwards for Davies to gather. But these were only half-chances really. In the 65th minute we had our first really good opening after Stanley broke down the left and put in a superb cross. Davies had anticipated this and came out of goal to cut out the cross, but it was so good that he was out of the picture, although the incoming Dyer then missed his kick from eight yards with the goal gaping!

Selsey sent a reminder that they were still in this match with a low shot from Rocco Gamblin that went into our side netting, but at this stage it was becoming a question of whether we would score or would have to go to penalties. With just two minutes of normal time we should have rendered penalties redundant as substitute Lewis Pearch beat a man on the right wing before running at goal and pulling the ball back nicely for Smith-Joseph, but he too then missed his kick from just ten yards out! Five minutes of additional time couldn't separate the teams and so we went straight to penalties.

This was our eleventh shoot out in club history (with just four wins from the previous ten) although it was our first since the Covid affected season of 2020/21 when we had two in three days. This one was to be held at the Leisure Centre end, which caused people a little surprise and led to a number of us having to get to the other end of the ground in rapid time! We went first in the shootout, but it looked like that advantage wouldn't count for much as Rory Edwards' kick was saved comfortably by Davies. Fortunately, Dillon North also produced an average penalty and Theobald went to his left and kept it out.

Stanley was the second man up and if I'm honest, his spot kick wasn't the greatest either. Davies went down to his right to save, which he did, sending the ball flying up into the air. However, it hadn't finished yet and it came down and spun over the goal line just out of reach of the frustrated keeper! We took full advantage of this piece of fortune and wouldn't let that lead slip. Superb penalties from Gavin Quintyne, who had an excellent game, Kevin Moreno Gomez and Wilson meant that we had scored four of our first five. However, Selsey also scored all of their remaining penalties so we were locked at 4-4 and went to sudden death. At number six Dyer stepped up as the only member of the sixteen players on show to have scored a penalty for us this season and his strike was unstoppable, although this was then answered equally emphatically by Dale Hayes.

Captain Acheampong stepped up to put us 6-5 ahead with a solid penalty, leaving the pressure all on James Henton to follow suit, and in truth his wasn't a bad penalty, straight down the middle, Theobald originally went to his left but reacted brilliantly to stick out a right leg, diverting the ball up onto the bar and away. We were through to the Playoff Final!

In summary, over the course of the match we were the better side and we deserved the win, even if it had to go to penalties before we could achieve it! Our final opponents this season will be Wick, who, like Selsey were beaten twice by us in the regular season and were on the end of a 6-1 hiding at Fetcham Grove back in September. Something tells me this next encounter will be a little closer!

So on Saturday 6th May we will say farewell to Fetcham Grove and hopefully also to Step Six football after five seasons at this level. I know some important chap is getting a crown put on his head the same day and good luck to him, but seriously, where would you rather be next weekend, the Abbey or the Grove?

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Nick Wilson, Steve Springett, Dylan Merchant, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Lewis Pearch for Byatt (68), Kevin Moreno-Gomez for Akoto (79), Alex Penfold for Springett (80), Rory Edwards for Penfold (86)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"Is it promotion you're looking for?"

24 September 2023



Back to back away victories for Epsom and Ewell FC win 2nd place in the league and home front play-offs for promotion. Richard Lambert reports on both matches:

Chessington & Hook United 1-2 Epsom & Ewell -Southern Combination League - Division One - Thursday 20th April 2023.

For the second match in a row we let a lead slip, but fought back to take all three points with a late winner, this time a close range 83rd minute header from Nick Wilson as we maintained our grip on the top playoff spot with a 2-1 victory over Chessington & Hook United at Chalky Lane.

The win maintained an extremely odd sequence of results between the clubs. At home we have only won one of our last eight matches against Chessington & Hook United, but at Chalky Lane it is a different story as we have only lost once in sixteen visits there! And in the end I felt we were worth the points, although there were times when I worried that it wasn't going to be our night as we spurned a number of good chances to make the game comfortable.

We made four changes from our win against Selsey with Athan Smith-Joseph rested after tweaking his hamstring on Saturday, while Alex Penfold and Rory Edwards came back into the starting line up at the expense of Steve Springett and Gavin Quintyne. Finally, further forward, Thompson Adeyemi came in for Jaan Stanley as we rotated our squad with one eye on another match coming up at Billingshurst in less than 48 hours.

We got off to a flying start with our first attack down the right wing where Adeyemi sent a low ball across goal and it was swept home clinically at the far post from twelve yards by Lewis Pearch in the 3rd minute to give us an early lead. Adeyemi then saw his shot blocked and also a follow up from Edwards as we tried to double our lead from a corner.

In the 13th minute it was Adeyemi again who tried his luck from twenty yards but found Chessington and Hook keeper Andrew Osei equal to the strike. The home side responded by forcing a couple of corners but we dealt with the deliveries into the box well enough and were soon on the attack again with Jamie Byatt seeing his shot tipped wide by Osei and then Dylan Merchant sending a header back across goal from a deep corner, only to see the ball cleared.

We had an excellent chance in the 41st minute when a defender's error let Pearch through on the right and his ball across goal was perfect for Adeyemi, but his left foot contact wasn't as secure as his right and a defender was able to clear the ball away from the goal line. Then Byatt had another try just before half time but his shot was straight at Osei and the last chance of the half also fell to Byatt whose twenty yard strike was far stronger than the one he netted with against Selsey on Saturday, but as a result it just didn't come down in time, clearing the bar by about three inches!

We should have been further ahead by the half and it is always a concern when chances aren't taken. Tom Theobald made a good block with his feet after a defensive slip, but we were back on the attack soon and a foul on Jaevon Dyer allowed us to float a free kick into the box, only for Osei to punch clear. The game was starting to get a little niggly, as is so often the case when these two teams meet and just after a bit of a scuffle the home side equalised with a ball in from the right that was collected by Joe Avery who cut inside Gideon Acheampong before firing the ball past Theobald at his near post from ten yards for the equaliser in the 55th minute.

This was ever so disappointing and we would have to go again. But we did. A Dyer run and pass to Wilson was hacked clear by Osei just ahead of our man who was then adjudged to have fouled the keeper. Stanley came on for Adeyemi and as we entered the final quarter of the match Dyer set up Pearch for a similar chance to the one he had scored from earlier, but this time he scuffed his shot wide of the post and then it was Dyer's chance to miss a good chance after great interplay between Stanley and Byatt had left him in space, but his touch let him down and Osei's leg was able to dispossess him.

Five minutes later Dyer robbed a defender and broke through on goal, drawing the keeper before flicking the ball on to Byatt, but instead of rolling the ball into the empty net from the edge of the area, he hesitated and a defender closed down the chance which then rebounded into Osei's arms! We made a couple of substitutions in the 77th minute with Springett and Quintyne entering the fray for Penfold and Byatt before we then had the second multi-player scuffle of the day, following a foul by Johnny Akoto, who was then kicked while on the deck. The refereeing could have been stronger in this match and although a card was issued to both sides here, it looked like the home team maybe ought to have seen red.

However, the main event occurred in the 83rd minute. Stanley was released down the right, although his ball across goal was just ahead of Wilson and just behind Dyer, by now operating on the left wing. He retrieved the ball though and sent a superb deep cross to the back post where Wilson met it with a solid downwards header just a couple of yards out from goal, giving Osei no chance to save it.

We played five minutes over the ninety which was about fair and managed the game well in that period with much of the time being spent near the corner flag and there were large celebrations from the away support and the players when the whistle blew for full time and the points were well deserved, even if we had required the late intervention to get all three of them.

So where does this leave us? Well, barring a seven goal swing in our final matches we will now finish in the top playoff spot, ensuring home matches throughout our participation in them. We are now level on points with second place Dorking Wanderers B whose goal difference is three goals better than ours. It is not impossible to catch them and if we could do that it would be the first time we had finished in the top two since 1984. As it is, third place is our highest finish since 2014 and represents a decent campaign, but concerns remain about our consistency as we approach the real business end of the season. A good showing against Billingshurst on Saturday is important to keep building any momentum before we return to Fetcham Grove to close out our season over hopefully the next two weekends.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Johnny Akoto, Nick Wilson, Dylan Merchant, Alex Penfold, Jaevon Dyer, Rory Edwards, Jamie Byatt, Thompson Adeyemi, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Adeyemi (65), Steve Springett for Penfold (77), Gavin Quintyne for Byatt (77), Kevin Moreno-Gomez for Dyer (86), George Owusu for Pearch (88)

Billingshurst 1-3 Epsom & Ewell Southern Combination League - Division One - Saturday 22nd April 2023

Cast your mind back to 1984. Lionel Richie was Number 1 with Hello, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and our boys had just clinched promotion to the Isthmian League Premier Division with a late 2-1 win at Farnborough Town that secured second place as we waited in the clubhouse for our Secretary to get confirmation of other results on the one phone they had there.

How times have changed, but if you are under the age of 40, you'll just have to trust me on this one. It was the last time we had finished as high as second place in any division. I'll be honest, I wasn't expecting it as I thought Dorking Wanderers B would win at Mile Oak and we would fall just behind them on goal difference, but a late equaliser for the Oak enabled us to pinch the runners-up spot (and presumably individual medals for our boys?) against the odds.

We made four changes to our starting line up following our win at Chessington & Hook United some 42 hours earlier with Steve Springett coming in at the back for Dylan Merchant who was unavailable. Gavin Quintyne and George Owusu came in for Nick Wilson and Jaevon Dyer who dropped to the bench, while Athan Smith-Joseph who came back in up front ahead of Jamie Byatt. Or so we thought! As it turned out Johnny "Sonic" Akoto was injured in the warm up and so Byatt came back in with Lewis Pearch drawing the short straw and finding himself moving from up front to the right back position with Captain Gideon Acheampong moving over to the left.

But despite the rotations, we scored a goal in the opening ten minutes for the third match in a row. Smith-Joseph got away down the left and fired a cross in. The ball was palmed away by Ollie Courtney but fell kindly to George Owusu who guided his volley over everyone and into the far corner for a smart finish in just the



fourth minute.

Unfortunately for the third week in a row we let that early lead slip as the hosts drew level just seven minutes later. Pearch tried to clear the ball under pressure in his unfamiliar position and the ball rebounded kindly for Sam Jobbins who had time to guide the ball beyond the reach of Tom Theobald into the far corner from just inside the penalty area.

We continued to make chances, particularly on the left, although the end product from Smith-Joseph was proving more of a threat to the trees behind the goal instead of the Billingshurst keeper. A Pearch chance deflected wide for a corner and then Owusu found Byatt but he was well marshalled and unable to get a powerful shot away.

We had one scare when a deep free kick was sent into our penalty area and no one took responsibility, leaving Robbie Tambling unmarked to volley the ball goalwards, but fortunately he was unable to keep the ball down and we went in at the half ahead on points, but not on the scoreboard.

We thought we had taken the lead early in the second half when Smith-Joseph's cute through ball found Owusu who netted from a narrow angle, but he was denied by the Assistant's flag. Then at the other end we had danger after Alex Penfold lost the ball, but pulled the striker down to take one for the team. It was an obvious yellow card with Acheampong covering so no further penalty would follow and the free kick was easily gathered by Theobald. Our keeper was active again as he had to dive to his left to keep a powerful shot out and another shot went just wide of our goal as we looked a little wobbly at this stage.

However, we made three substitutions in ten minutes and Dyer then restored our lead within seconds of joining the fray; cutting in from the left and striking a shot at goal which took a deflection off a defender's outstretched leg and looped somewhat harshly over Courtney into the net in the 73rd minute.

We then had another chance when Dyer's initial cross was blocked back out to Smith-Joseph whose ball in to the near post was blazed over the bar by Wilson as the ball bobbed on him just four yards out, but fortunately just a couple of minutes later in the 79th minute we gained some breathing space when Smith-Joseph tried his luck with a strike that Courtney had covered, only for the ball to hit him squarely in the hands and just drop apologetically over the line for our third goal!

The hosts were looking visibly tired by now after matches on Tuesday and Thursday and with Dorking Wanderers leading at this stage, I was aware that two more goals would give us second place even if they held on to win. As it happened though, we wouldn't need them as the Mile Oak result went our way. It was all good, although there were a couple of injury concerns as Springett picked up a broken nose and then in the final minutes Penfold went down having pulled his groin, which threatens to put a premature end to his season. The injury gave Jack Porter a rare run out for the final moments, becoming to my knowledge the first person in club history to take the field with a number 21 shirt!

The result and the late drama elsewhere in our favour was reminiscent of that spring evening in 1984 and may well live as long in the memory. Back then of course, second place guaranteed us automatic promotion, while now we have to win two playoff matches to secure it, but unlike last season we go into these contests with as much momentum as anyone after compiling a run of five matches unbeaten with three straight wins. One of those was a 3-2 victory over Selsey who we now host just two weeks after they last visited and the hope is that we can repeat that victory this coming weekend. To paraphrase Lionel Richie, "is it promotion you're looking for?"

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Lewis Pearch, Rory Edwards, Steve Springett, Alex Penfold, George Owusu, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Thompson Adeyemi, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Adeyemi (62), Nick Wilson for Edwards (72), Jaevon Dyer for Byatt (72), Jack Porter for Penfold (92)

<http://eefconline.co.uk/>